

The Globalization of African Elections

The Voting of Malian Emigrants

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Nowadays, more than a hundred countries or territories grant external voting rights to their citizens living abroad. Still, the ways in which migrations impact the origin countries' polity have been largely ignored. This essay studies the impact of such new voting rights in Africa, a continent with a high percentage of migrants, exploring the case of Mali's most recent elections.

Global flows of migrants and refugees are now affecting states' policies to an unprecedented degree. As has been widely analyzed by scholars specialized in transnational migrations, host countries are erecting walls to discourage undesirables while opening doors to attract the highly skilled. At the same time, origin countries are developing specific institutional tools to attract migrants' financial remittances, or are seeking their advice to implement local or national development schemes.

Yet the ways in which migrations have been impacting the origin countries' polity have been largely ignored. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 115 countries or territories now grant external voting rights to their citizens living abroad.¹ This change is particularly significant in the case of Africa, with its high percentage of migrants and the political transitions it experienced in the early 1990s, when it began holding competitive multi-party elections at home and abroad.² Nowadays, out-of-country African citizens may influence election results as much as local population in the home country administrative capitals or in the most remote rural village markets.

The Holding Of "Inclusive" Elections After An Unprecedented Security Crisis

The Mali election's highly anticipated first and second rounds respectively held on July 28 and August 11 have shed a light on what is at stake in the external elections.

¹ See International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico (IFE), *Voting from Abroad: The International IDEA Handbook*, Stockholm, International IDEA & Mexico, IFE, 2007.

² For Senegal, see Jean-Philippe Dedieu, Lisa Chauvet, Flore Gubert, Sandrine Mesplé-Somps, Etienne Smith, "Les « batailles » de Paris et de New York. Une analyse du comportement électoral transnational des migrants sénégalais en France et aux Etats-Unis," *Revue française de science politique*, october 2013 (to be published).

This landlocked country with its long migration history³ has been fragmented by a deep declining faith in democracy, a progressive rejection of governmental corruption and an unprecedented security crisis that began last year.⁴ Triggered in March 2012 by a junta coup and worsened by jihadist attacks and Tuareg separatist insurgency, it was finally ended by French and Malian military intervention in January 2013 and the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement in June 2013⁵.

Following the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 2085 in December 2012, Malian transitional authorities led by interim president Dioncounda Traoré were urged to finalize a "transitional road map" calling for the establishment of a "broad-based political dialogue" and the holding of a "peaceful, credible, and inclusive" presidential election.

To achieve this process endorsed last semester by Mali's National Assembly, transitional authorities had to ensure that not only local population participate in the polls, but also migrants who usually live abroad, and refugees who have fled to neighboring countries due to the armed conflict.

Origins of External Voting Rights

Since the overthrow by a "popular revolution" of the General Moussa Traoré in March 1991, Mali has been willing (and to a limited extent able) to integrate its out-of-country citizens into their birth country's electoral processes.⁶

The aim of Mali's National Conference, held in July-August 1991 under the leadership of the Chairman of the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the Malian People (CTSP) Lt. Col. Amadou Toumani Touré, was to reconcile a nation that had suffered almost 25 years of dictatorship and to set up democratic state institutions as well as establish political pluralism.

Present at the Conference in Bamako were migrants who had left their homeland years earlier due to ongoing poverty, food insecurity and Sahelian drought, and former political refugees forced by

³ Gregory Mann, *Native Sons. West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2006 ; Daouda Gary-Toukara, *Migrants soudanais/maliens et conscience ivoirienne. Les étrangers en Côte d'Ivoire (1903-1980)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2008 ; Marie Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal (1900-1946)*, Paris, Karthala, 2009 ; Jean-Philippe Dedieu, *La parole immigrée. Les migrants africains dans l'espace public en France (1960 - 1995)*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2012.

⁴ Since the coup, academic articles have been published. See, for example, Susanna Wing, "The Coup in Mali Is Only the Beginning. Bamako's Democratic Reputation Goes Bam," *Foreign Affairs*, April 11, 2012 ; Julien Gavelle, Johanna Siméant, Laure Traoré, "Le court terme de la légitimité – prises de position, rumeurs et perceptions, janvier-septembre 2012 à Bamako," *Politique africaine*, 130, 2013, pp. 23-46 ; Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belalimat, Bruce Hall, and Wolfram Lacher, "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts. A Multivocal Analysis of the 2012 Political Crisis in the Divided Republic of Mali", *Review of African Political Economy*, 137, 2013, pp. 1-15.

⁵ See Roland Marchal, "Military (Mis)Adventures In Mali", *African Affairs* (à paraître).

⁶ Jean-Philippe Dedieu, *Origins of External Voting Rights. A Case Study from Mali*, DIAL Working Paper, October 2013, 45 p.

military rule to seek asylum in France or Senegal. Their former high-risk struggles and participation in Mali's economic development were duly acknowledged.

Completing the establishment in the first CTSP government of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Malians Living Abroad headed by Tiébilé Dramé, the final acts of the Conference included a recommendation to revise Mali's foreign policy. This proposal not only advocated "the creation of embassies and consulates depending on the importance of Malian communities and interests and needs" of the country, but also "the association of Malians from abroad to the redeployment of the diplomatic map."

Extensive changes were made in electoral procedures. Out-of-country citizens were granted external voting rights that entered into effect with the October 1991 electoral code. The Malian political parties' international branches were formally recognized.

Since the first free election that resulted, in April 1992, in the victory of Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) candidate Alpha Oumar Konaré,⁷ Malian expatriates have been entitled to go to the polls in presidential elections.

The external turnout rate, however, has always been considerably lower than the internal rate. This persistent gap that is in line with classic sociological analyses regarding abstention, underscores the precariousness of migrants' living conditions abroad, their geographical dispersion within receiving countries, as well as the regular flaws of registration procedures set up by Malian consular authorities. It also reflects the out-of-country citizens' serious doubts about the competence of Malian local politicians⁸ – a view shared by the local population, according to a 2013 Afrobarometer survey.⁹

Courting Migrants

The Mali presidential campaign – stopped by the military coup that toppled Amadou Toumani Touré's administration in power since 2002 – was once again under full steam last June, both in the country and abroad.

Many political party leaders with significant financial resources had been on the road to crisscross Mali as well as African neighboring countries. They were seeking to attract the out-of-country citizens whose electoral weight was roughly equivalent to a region of their home country in the 2007 race. At first glance, the number of external voters appears to be small and therefore possibly negligible. Yet one must recall the influence they have on their families left behind who

⁷ Created in May 1991 by opposition group leaders during Traoré regime, ADEMA, which ruled the country from 1992 to 2002, has achieved "structure" in the diaspora. In spite of the current widespread voter disaffection, 27 out of 55 sections are said to be abroad today. Interview with Ibrahima N'Diaye, ADEMA's first Vice-President, Bamako, June 25, 2013.

⁸ Lisa Chauvet, Jean-Philippe Dedieu, Flore Gubert, Sandrine Mesplé-Somps, "[What Malians in France expect of their future president. Preliminary findings of a survey taken at the polls](#)," *DIAL/IRD Press release*, August 1, 2013.

⁹ Massa Coulibaly, Michael Bratton, "[Crisis in Mali: Ambivalent Popular Attitudes on the Way Forward](#)," *Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 113*, 2013.

depend on their remittances. Therefore, by travelling in destination countries, Mali political leaders were seeking to capture as many votes from the out-of-country citizens as they were from their extensive kinship networks in Mali.

Several top candidates such as Soumaila Cissé of the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD), a former finance minister, Dramane Dembelé, running on behalf of Mali's biggest party, ADEMA, and Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta of Rally for Mali (RPM), a former prime minister and President of the Mali National Assembly, toured Gabon or Ivory Coast.

In Europe also – especially in France, the most symbolic and the main European destination country since the colonial era – party militants have been rallying for their candidates or displaying posters of them in Paris suburban streets.

Registering Migrants

	2007 Electoral Body	2013 Electoral Body
External electoral body	617 161	265 151
Africa (Ivory Coast alone)	571 006 (366 600)	214,816 (100 499)
Americas	5 302	3 384
Asia	960	1 278
Europe	26 135	39 333
Middle East	13 758	6 340
Internal electoral body	6 267 363	6 564 545
Total electoral body	6 884 524	6 829 696

Sources: Voting results of the 2007 and 2013 presidential elections
(Mali Ministry of Territorial Administration)
Calculation by the author

Table 1. The shrinking external electoral body

The African continent is still the principal destination region for Malian migrants. In the 2007 race, Ivory Coast, a long-time favored emigration country for Malians, was by far the leading country on the regional map of extra-territorialized voting. Its two polling “centers” accounted for 59% of the external voting population: in Abidjan, the administrative capital, and in Bouaké, the second largest city.

Yet this year the registration process took into account only a minority of the hundreds of thousands of Malian migrants living there. The administrative census (called RAVEC) that had been organized a few years ago in the country and abroad in coordination with Malian consular and diplomatic posts, had been highly disrupted by the civil conflict that had plagued Ivory Coast, and particularly by the 2010-2011 electoral violence. The registered Malian population in Ivory Coast dropped this year by 73%, from 366 600 in 2007 to 100 499 in 2013. This decrease is probably due as much to the problems encountered by RAVEC agents as to the outflows of Malian migrants from Ivory Coast.¹⁰

This clearly illustrates how regional security crises have affected the capacity of Malian administration to build effective transnational policies and to “govern” its out-of-country population. More broadly, it also shows the reasons why the Ministry of Malians Living Abroad was almost never a fully independent ministry, but one always attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of African Integration. Migration governance cannot be separated from diplomacy. Both dimensions are deeply and almost always intertwined.¹¹

In Europe, Malians citizens encountered also numerous administrative difficulties. In France, they demonstrated in mid-July against the bureaucratic red tape they had to overcome to obtain their NINA polling card due to the shortcomings of the RAVEC census realized in France. Their claims, as well as the tight electoral deadline imposed by the French government and multilateral donors, had put election officials under mounting pressure¹². If registered Malian population in France increased by 24% from 24 494 in 2007 to 30 354 in 2013, this increase does not reflect the actual size of the population that should have been enrolled and has been estimated at more than 80 000.

In other parts of the world, the changes have been mixed. While registered populations have decreased in the Middle East and in the Americas, Asia’s electoral population was increasing, due entirely to enrollment in China. A second polling station in Guangzhou was added to the already existing one in Beijing.¹³ As a result, the registered population doubled from 410 in 2007 to 860 in 2013. Even if their number is extremely modest, this rise attests to the geographical diversification of African migration flows in the wake of Africa’s rampant regional crises, the xenophobic closing of European borders, and the strengthening of Africa-China commercial ties.

Enrolling the Refugees

¹⁰ Interviews led by Anda David and Marion Mercier (researchers at DIAL) with Mali civil servants in Ivory Coast under confidentiality conditions, July 29, 2013.

¹¹ Sadio Soukouna, *L'Échec d'une coopération franco malienne sur les migrations. Les logiques du refus malien de signer*, a master’s thesis directed by Johanna Siméant, Université Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, 2011.

¹² Christophe Boisbouvier, « Tiebilé Dramé sur RFI: « On fait du fétichisme autour de la date du 28 juillet » », *RFI*, July 18, 2013.

¹³ Electronic exchanges with Sam Piranty, the Senior Video Journalist at Think Africa Press, August 1, 2013. See also Sam Piranty, “[Malians Vote in China: We Malians are all over the World, not just in Bamako](#),” *Think Africa Press*, July 26, 2013 as well as Roberto Castillo’s ethnographic research on Africans in Guangzhou available on: africansinchina.net.

For the recent 173 000 refugees who have settled in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, or Niger since the onset of the crisis, the registration process was also far from assured. Malian embassies tried to register them with the support of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which has previously facilitated out-of-country voting by refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and South Sudan.

A couple of days before the first round, the Agency had officially warned that refugees' electoral participation could not be considered "meaningful."¹⁴ Whether in spontaneous camps or hosted by family members, Mali's refugees have been enduring difficult living conditions. A significant number lost their ID cards while fleeing their homelands. A high percentage of them were children but also women, whose electoral abstention has been traditionally high.¹⁵ Furthermore, according to NGO reports, some men had returned to their villages to take full advantage of the rainy season so vital to crops.

Some striking visual evidence of the administrative barriers to refugee voting has been presented in newspapers and on social networks. As for the local Mali population regularly covered for *The Guardian* or *The New York Times* by Joe Penney, a talented Reuters photo-journalist, refugees have also appeared to have been endlessly looking for their names on electoral lists without necessarily finding them. An eloquent series of photos from Mauritania published by Dalia Al Achi, Regional Public Information Officer of the UNHCR North Africa on her own Twitter account pages, show this almost absurd search a few days or even hours before election day.¹⁶

The Long Wait for the Results

The first round watched by national and international observers such as the African Union (AU) or European Union (EU) contradicted fears of absolute disorganization and threats of terrorist attacks rumored during the run-up to the election.

The day after the polls closed, Louis Michel, the EU Chief Observer for the Mali elections, declared that "the election took place in a calm atmosphere" despite "incidents," and "imperfections."¹⁷ In his preliminary report, UA Chief Observer Edem Kodjo pointed out some "irregularities" in the ballot counting, as well as delays in the "transmission of results of some centralization commissions" that could not be merely attributed to damaged Mali road infrastructures.

The first round' final results were announced after several days of waiting amid alarming rumors of a post-electoral crisis. The Mali Constitutional Court validated them. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (nicknamed IBK) obtained 39,23% of the votes (1.2 million voters throughout and beyond Mali).

¹⁴ Misha Hussain, Abdoulaye Massalatchi, "[Forced to flee war, many Malian refugees to miss vote](#)," *Reuters*, July 27, 2013.

¹⁵ Madou Nimaga, *L'abstentionnisme électoral au Mali depuis l'avènement du multipartisme en 1992*, a master's thesis directed by Ismaïla Madior Fall, Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD), Dakar, 2008.

¹⁶ See, for example, Dalia Al Achi (@DaliaALACHI), "J-1 avant les élections, les réfugiés maliens en #Mauritanie vérifient leurs noms sur les listes électorales," #Mali pic.twitter.com/8PBxSCR18v, July 27, 2013, 8 :36 PM. Tweet.

¹⁷ David Lewis, Tiemoko Diallo, "[Mali counts votes, cheered by high turnout in presidential race](#)," *Reuters*, July 29, 2013.

His main challenger Soumaila Cissé received 19,44%, (0.6 million). Far behind, Dramane Dembélé obtained 9,59% (0.3 million). All of the other candidates got 5%, or much less.

A second round was organized on August 11. The poll proceeded peacefully despite strong rains in Bamako, Kayes and Koulikoro regions. Results were released faster than first round's ones.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was elected president of the Mali Republic with 77,61% of the votes.

In Spite of a Shrinking Electoral Body, an Impressive Diaspora Turnout

Results showed that the electoral participation reached an all-time high of 45,78% since the 1991 revolution. It reversed an abstention trend that had begun under Amadou Toumani Touré.

With 3 million voters, the internal turnout rate for the second round (45,9%) increased by almost one quarter compared to the last election (37,8% with 2.4 million).

This significant upsurge underlines the Malian population's great expectations for a return to stability after an unprecedented crisis that has very directly affected 6.1 million people in the Northern regions.¹⁸

Contrary to past results, the external turnout rate is more than doubled (41,8%) since the last election (19,3% in 2007). Yet, the external electoral body has shrunk with only 0.3 million registered citizens to be compared to 0.6 in 2007.

The frustrations of Malians living abroad are easily understood, especially in France where the turnout rate is only of 28,7% due to the RAVEC flaws. Malians migrants feared for the safety of their families left behind after the coup, and particularly after the quick fall of Kidal, Gao, and finally Timbuktu to rebels. Furthermore, their remittances that are usually so important for Mali households and estimated at more than USD 400 million by the World Bank, are likely to have increased due to the political situation and the freeze on multilateral aid¹⁹. Their impressive turnout rate attests as much to the strength of their kinship ties as it does to their willingness to belong to the Malian polity at a time of crisis that has shaken the collective identity of Malian citizens as a whole.

The Exclusion of Refugees

As regards refugees, the turnout rate is extremely troubling, especially for the first round. According to some sources, there were only 811 voters out of 11,355 registered refugees in

¹⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Call for Mali 2013*, December 13, 2012, p. 1.

¹⁹ See the preliminary findings of a survey taken in France by DIAL/IRD at the polls during the first round of Mali presidential election on July 28.

Mauritania, 323 out of 4,161 in Niger, and 85 out of 3,504 in Burkina Faso.²⁰ According to international observers I interviewed, “obstacles of administrative, bureaucratic and logistic nature led many refugees to be excluded from casting their vote.”²¹ The main reasons mentioned were “the fact that most refugees did not get their NINA cards (at all or not on time)” and “the low number of refugees found on the RAVEC lists”.²²

For the second round, the number of refugees participating in election's run off increased, especially in Mauritania. UN peacekeeping force MINUSMA flew in more than two thousands additional NINA cards to allow Malian refugees to vote. This operation does not seem to have been duplicated to the same extent in other countries.

Considering that most refugees were Tuaregs from northern Mali, it would have been an extremely welcome and highly pragmatic sign of national reconciliation if everything that had been reasonably possible had actually been done.

For the last few days, reports have started to surface that refugees were returning home.²³ That sounds like perfectly timed good news. Yet as documented by diaspora and migration historians,²⁴ refugees – whether fleeing or returning – always bring with them personal and collective memories of their sufferings and of the humiliations inflicted upon them by brutal or simply ineffective administrations. Malian refugees' exclusion from voting should have been duly prevented, considering the political origins of the Mali crisis. Their participation would have caused the real significance of the Ouagadougou Agreement to take root in the “daily” lives of “ordinary” citizens.

Diverging Preferences between Voters in Mali and Abroad?

For the second round, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta obtained 77,61% of the votes with million voters throughout and beyond Mali. Considered as being close to the French government as well as some religious leaders, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta is seen as having been ambiguous towards the military junta, and representing a Mali “patriotic vote”.²⁵ His main challenger Soumaila Cissé who showed his opposition to the coup, received 22,39%, with 0,7 million.

Closer examination reveals that the diaspora supported Keïta far less than the local population. The difference between them is of 56% for the internal voters and 37% for the external voters.

2013	Number Registere d Maliens	Number of voters	Number of valid votes	Turn out rate (%)	% of valid votes for	% of valid votes for	Differential between IBK and S. Cissé
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²⁰ Electronic exchanges with a representative of an international organization, August 1, 2013.

²¹ Electronic exchanges with an international observer, August 2, 2013.

²² Electronic exchanges with an international observer, August 6, 2013.

²³ Jemal Oumar, “[Malian Refugees Leave Mauritania](#),” *Allafrica.com*, August 1, 2013.

²⁴ Gérard Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France (XIXe-XXe siècle). Discours publics, humiliations privées*, Paris, Fayard, 2007.

²⁵ Comments made by Gilles Holder, in Adam Nossiter, “[In Mali, A Race Between a Former Finance Minister and a Pro-French Favorite](#)”, *The New York Times*, August 2, 2013.

					IBK	S. Cissé	
External	265,151	110,810	107,529	41.79	68.30	31.76	+ 36.54
Ivory Coast	100,499	53,309	50,960	53.04	64.21	35.79	+ 28.42
Internal	6,564,545	3,015,711	2,926,072	45.94	77.95	22.05	+ 55.91
Global data	6,829,696	3,126,521	3,033,601	45.78	77.61	22.39	+ 55.22

Source: Electoral results of the 2013 presidential election's second round
(Mali Ministry of Territorial Administration)
Calculation by the author

Table 2. External and internal electoral preferences for the 2013 first round

The voting in Ivory Coast explains this strong difference de 19%. The gap can be accounted for by the fact that the future RPM candidate for the 2013 race took controversial positions during the 2010-2011 post-electoral violence in Ivory Coast. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta who had befriended Laurent Gbagbo during his student years in Paris, was a former Ambassador to this country in the 1990s before retruning to Mali and being named Minister of Foreign Affairs and Malians Living Abroad. He had kept good relationships with him, both of them having been in the influential networks of the Socialist International (SI) and of the French Socialist Party. During the post-electoral crisis in Ivory Coast, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta does not seem to have shown a particular empathy for Malian citizens.

As detailed in a Human Rights Watch 2011 report, the wave of xenophobia pervading the country since Felix Houphouët-Boigny's death, reached a new peak during this period. Like many Burkinabé, Guinean, or Nigerian migrants, Malian citizens had seen their houses or shops bombed with grenades by pro-Gbagbo militiamen. Others had been beaten or simply executed.²⁶ At a 2010 press conference in Bamako, he would have even denied the accusations leveled against Laurent Gbagbo and his militiamen: "Laurent Gbagbo is not monstrous, he has no Malian blood on his hands."²⁷ Those widely reported public stances hurt Malian migrants in Ivory Coast or former repatriates from Ivory Coast. The voting of Malian citizens in Abidjan and Bouaké may reflect his indifference to their past sufferings and his enduring support to a foreign political leader who is now charged with several crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Unfortunately, it is impossible at this stage to analyze in greater detail the external voters' political preferences. First of all, it is not known if the flaws of the RAVEC census affected

²⁶ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Côte d'Ivoire. "They Killed Them Like It Was Nothing" The Need for Justice for Côte d'Ivoire's Post-Election Crimes*, New York, Human Rights Watch, October 5, 2011.

²⁷ B. Diarrassouba, « Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta : Lâcher Gbagbo ou « mourir » avec lui », *Maliweb.net*, December 22, 2010.

Malian citizens living abroad randomly or selectively. Secondly, there are insufficient qualitative or quantitative data on the Malian diaspora's social and demographic characteristics in the different jurisdictions worldwide. Finally, the Malian political parties' international branches have been under-researched by scholars and under-reported by local or international journalists.

Since the early 1980s, migrant's monetary remittances derived from savings realized on their often menial salaries, sometimes under extreme conditions, have become a new "paradigm" or "mantra" for the economic development of origin countries.²⁸

In the case of Mali, this paradigm has been promoted as much by the successive French governments in the hope of curbing African migration flows as by the Mali administration in order to channel migrants' monetary transfers into national development schemes²⁹.

The manner in which this decisive election has been conducted for migrants demonstrates the extent to which Malian state keeps them out of their birth country's political development while asking them to take an active part in the economic development. This oversight is tantamount to a renouncement of the 1991 Revolution commitments that have become a "nationalist" reference in the current Mali public sphere.³⁰

Refugees who have fled the Northern regions to neighboring countries, have also been disenfranchised. They have been marginalized in an electoral process that was meant to be "broad-based" and "inclusive." It is not yet known whether they will support the new president and his administration.

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²⁸ Devesh Kapur, *Remittances: The New Development Mantra?*, Harvard University & Center for Global Development, G-24 Discussion Paper No. 29, April 2004.

²⁹ See chapter III « Les développeurs. Éloge de la terre ou « répression compassionnelle »? » of Jean-Philippe Dedieu, *La parole immigrée. Les migrants africains dans l'espace public en France (1960 - 1995)*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2012.

³⁰ Julien Gavelle, Johanna Siméant, Laure Traoré, "Le court terme de la légitimité – prises de position, rumeurs et perceptions, janvier-septembre 2012 à Bamako," *Politique africaine*, 130, 2013, pp. 23-46.